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DOP FEAR, No. 11, Published bi-monthly by Superior Publishers Limited, 2382 Dundas Street West, Toronto 9, by arrangement with Educational Comics, Inc., 225 Lafayette Street, New York 12, N.Y. Authorized as the Post Office Department at Ottawa, Ontario. Subscriptions: 10 issues for $1.00 single copies
Printed in Canada

THE WITCH'S CAULDRON!

HEE,HEE! I SEE BY YOUR PALE WIDE-EYED PUSS THAT YOU MANAGED TO SCROUNGE A DIME FOR MY MAD-MAG! WELL, I'LL GIVE YOU YOUR MONEY'S WORTH ALL RIGHT! YES, IT'S *ME* AGAIN! *THE OLD WITCH*...MISTRESS OF *THE HAUNT OF FEAR!* SEE? ALREADY *MY CAULDRON* IS *BUBBLING* AND *BOILING* WITH ITS *REEKING BREW* OF STARK *TERROR!* COME IN AND I'LL *SERVE* YOU UP A *SAMPLE!* GOT YOUR *DROOL-CUPS* FASTENED? GOOD! HERE GOES WITH THE *HORROR-HELPING* I CALL...

OOZE IN THE CELLAR?

GHASTLY

SILAS THORNTON UNLATCHED THE CELLAR DOOR AND SWUNG IT OPEN! THE MUSTY ODOR OF DAMPNESS AND DECAY WAFTED UPWARD! SILAS'S WIFE, EMILY, SIGHED AS HER AGING HUSBAND STARTED DOWN THE CREAKING STEPS WITH THE CARTON OF OLD CLOTHES IN HIS ARMS...

PLEASE, SILAS! THE CELLAR IS *SO CLUTTERED ALREADY!* PERHAPS THE MATRONS OF THE ORPHANAGE NEXT DOOR COULD *USE* THE CLOTHES! WHY *SAVE* THEM?

IN THIS HOUSE, WE *DON'T THROW AWAY ANYTHING* THAT MIGHT BE *USEFUL*, EMILY! NEVER CAN TELL WHEN YOU MIGHT *NEED* SOME OLD RAGS!

SILAS REACHED THE FOOT OF THE STEPS AND LOOKED ABOUT! THE CELLAR WAS INDEED CLUTTERED! THIRTY YEARS THEY'D LIVED IN THE HOUSE, AND FOR THIRTY YEARS THE COLLECTION IN THE CELLAR HAD GROWN! A NARROW PASSAGE LEADING TO THE FURNACE WAS THE ONLY SPACE NOT FILLED! SILAS MOVED ALONG THE AISLE SEARCHING FOR A PLACE TO STORE THE CARTON! EMILY'S VOICE DRIFTED DOWN TO HIM...

THAT CELLAR IS A SHAME, SILAS... A *SHAME!* IT...IT *SMELLS* FROM ALL THE JUNK DOWN THERE! IT SHOULD BE *THROWN OUT...ALL OF IT!*

MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS, EMILY! I'M NOT THROWING *ANYTHING* OUT!

BEYOND THE CELLAR WINDOW, SO COVERED WITH DUST AND DIRT THAT SILAS COULD NO LONGER SEE THROUGH, VOICES AND LAUGHTER OF YOUNG CHILDREN AT PLAY ECHOED INTO THE SUNNY SUMMER AIR...

BLASTED *BRATS!* THEY'D BE GRABBIN' AT *EVERYTHING* WITH THEIR GREASY LITTLE PAWS IF THEY HAD THE *ONANCE!*

SILAS'S GLANCE SWEPT ACROSS THE PILED-HIGH CELLAR! HERE AR OLD CANARY CAGE RUSTED, THERE A BROKEN PHONOGRAPH WITH ITS ANCIENT HORR-SPEAKER YAWNED. MAGAZINES, BOOKS, AND PAPERS LAY STACKED CRAZILY, COLUMN AFTER COLUMN. BUNDLES OF OLD CLOTHES, MILDEWED AND MOTH-EATER, ROTTED SILERTLY. AR OLD STUFFED CHAIR, SOGGY ARD DECAYING, SQUATTED LADEN WITH EMPTY BOTTLES ARD JARS...

WHY SHOULD *THEY* HAVE IT? I *PAID GOOD MONEY* FOR ALL THIS STUFF! IF I CAN'T *SELL* IT...I'M NOT GOING TO *GIVE* IT AWAY!

OLD LAMPS RUSTED OR DUST LADEN TABLES... CARTONS OF LEFT-OVER WALL PAPER ROLLS SAGGED BESIDE BUCKETS OF PAINT, LONG-SINCE HARDENED... BROKEN SPRINGS AND TORN MATTRESSES, THEIR STUFFINGS POKING THROUGH, STOOD JAMMED AGAINST OLD TRUNKS PACKED WITH OLD FORGOTTER ARTICLES! SILAS PUT THE CARTON OF OLD CLOTHES DOWN ON A MOUND OF WORN DISCARDED SHOES...

CAN'T TELL! SOMEDAY I MIGHT NEED SOMETHIN' DOWN HERE!

SILAS TURNED AND MOVED BACK ACROSS THE DIRT CELLAR FLOOR AND UP THE RICKETY STEPS! OUTSIDE THE HOUSE, EMILY STOOD AT THE SPIKED FENCE SILAS HAD PUT UP TO KEEP THE ORPHAN CHILDREN OFF HIS PROPERTY! THEY CROWDED AROUND HER, CLAMORING...

EMILY!

OH! ER...YES, SILAS! EXCUSE ME, CHILDREN!

SILAS'S FACE WAS PURPLE WITH RAGE AS EMILY CAME INTO THE HOUSE...

WHAT WERE YOU *GIVING* THOSE BRATS?

JUST SOME *APPLES* THAT HAD FALLEN FROM THE TREE, SILAS! WE *CAN'T* EAT THEM *ALL!*

THEN GET SOME *JARS* FROM THE CELLAR AND *CAN* THEM! *SAVE 'EM!* WE *DON'T GIVE* AWAY FOOD!

YES, SILAS!

THE CHILDREN AT THE ORPHANAGE KNEW ALL ABOUT THE COLLECTION IN SILAS'S CELLAR! ONCE, LONG AGO, ONE OF THE BRAVER BOYS HAD CLIMBED THE FENCE AND PEERED IN THROUGH THE DIRTY WINDOW! HIS TALE OF THE FABULOUS TREASURES STORED THERE HAD BEEN MAGNIFIED THROUGH THE YEARS..

AND A *SHINEY NEW PHONOGRAPH* THAT'S *NEVER EVEN BEEN PLAYED!*

GOLLY! I WISH HE'D GIVE IT TO *US!* I *LIKE* TO HEAR *MUSIC!*

THE RAGGED CONDITION OF THE CLOTHES THE ORPHANS WERE DRESSED IN MADE SILAS'S CELLAR SOUND SO WONDERFUL...

BUNDLES OF CLOTHES... IN *ALL COLORS...NEVER BEEN WORN!* AND *SHOES*...PAIRS AND PAIRS OF *POLISHED, GLEAMING SHOES!*

SEE! WE COULD CERTAINLY *USE* THEM! LOOK... AT... SOB... *MY* SHOES!

FROM THE CHILDREN'S GOSSIPING, EVEN THE MATRONS OF THE ORPHANAGE WONDERED ABOUT SILAS'S CELLAR...

AND HE'S SUPPOSED TO HAVE EVEN NICE *FURNITURE* DOWN THERE!

MY! WE *DO* NEED FURNITURE *BADLY!*

ONCE THEY'D EVEN GONE TO SILAS...TO ASK HIM IF HE'D GIVE THEM THE THINGS HE NO LONGER USED...THINGS THEY NEEDED SO DESPERATELY..

GET OUT! GET OUT, YOU OLD HAGS!

DEAR, DEAR! WHAT AN UNCOUTH PERSON!

AND THE CHILDREN HAD FOUND OUT ABOUT THE RECEPTION SILAS HAD GIVEN THE WOMEN THAT RAN THE ORPHANAGE...

STINGY OLD MAN!

MISER!

GET AWAY FROM THAT FENCE!

EACH FALL, THE APPLE TREE IN SILAS'S GARDEN BENT UNDER THE WEIGHT OF THE SUCCULENT RED FRUIT! BUT SILAS REFUSED TO PART WITH ANY OF IT! IN THE CELLAR, JARS AND JARS OF HOME-CANNED APPLES LINED A COB-WEBBY SHELF...

BUT, SILAS! WE'LL *NEVER* USE UP THE APPLES I'VE *ALREADY* CANNED!

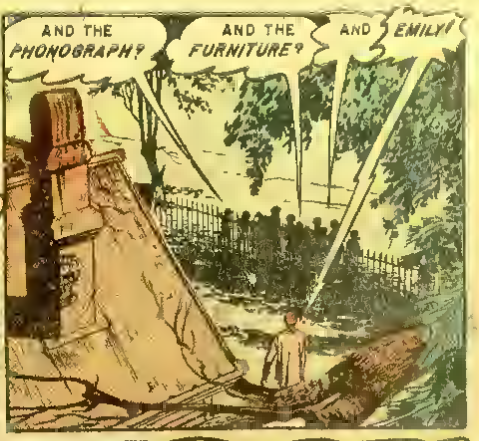
CAN'T TELL! *BETTER'N GIVIN' 'EM AWAY!*

WHEN SILAS WAS NOT AROUND, THE CHILDREN WOULD BEG EMILY TO INTERCEDE...TO MAKE SILAS GIVE THEM THE THINGS THAT HE'D HOARDED...

NO, CHILDREN! YOU'RE WRONG! THE THINGS THAT WE HAVE IN THE CELLAR ARE OLD! THEY'RE WORN AND RUSTED! YOU WOULDN'T WANT THEM!

AW! *YOU'RE JUST LIKE HIM!* YOU'RE A MISER, TOO!

AND SO, THROUGH THE YEARS, AS THE CELLAR FILLED UP, EVEN EMILY CAME TO BELIEVE THAT THE JUNK IN THE CELLAR SHOULD BE GIVEN TO THE CHILDREN! SHE RESENTED BEING CLASSED WITH HER FRUGAL HUSBAND AS A MISER! THAT'S WHY SHE BEGAN TO SLIP THE APPLES TO THE CHILDREN WHEN SILAS WAS NOT AROUND...



AND NOW SILAS HAD CAUGHT HER AT THE FENCE...GIVING THE CHILDREN THE RIPE RED APPLES! AND HE'D YELLED AT HER...

EMILY SPENT THE REST OF THE DAY COOKING THE APPLES AND PREPARING THEM FOR CANNING! TOWARD EVENING SHE WENT DOWN INTO THE CELLAR FOR THE JARS! SHE GAZED ABOUT AT THE ARRAY OF JUNK WITH TEAR-FILLED EYES.

EMILY'S FACE WAS PALE, NOW! HER EYES WERE WIDE AND STARING! SHE RAN HER FINGERS OVER THE PHONOGRAPH HORN, TRACING TRACKS THROUGH THE DUST...

ABOUT SUPPER TIME, SILAS MISSED EMILY! HE SEARCHED THE HOUSE FOR HER, FINALLY COMING UPON THE OPEN CELLAR DOOR...

YOU'RE CRAZY, EMILY! COME UP HERE AT ONCE!
NO, SILAS! NOT UNTIL YOU DO AS I ASK!
SILAS EXPLODED! HE SLAMMED THE CELLAR DOOR SHUT AND SLID THE BOLT CLOSED..
THEN STAY DOWN THERE, YOU IDIOT! STAY THERE ALL NIGHT FOR ALL I CARE!
I WILL, SILAS! YOU'LL SEE! I'LL COME UP WHEN YOU PROMISE!
SILAS ATE COOKED APPLES FOR SUPPER THAT NIGHT! HE LISTENED FOR EMILY'S KNOCK... FOR SOME SIGN THAT SHE'D RELENTED..BUT NONE CAME.
EMILY? I'M GOING TO BED! ARE YOU COMING UP?
NOT UNTIL YOU AGREE, SILAS!
SILAS STORMED OFF TO BED! HE WAS DETERMINED NOW TO TEACH EMILY A LESSON! IN THE MORNING HE ATE MORE COOKED APPLES FOR BREAKFAST...LISTENING AT THE CELLAR DOOR! NO SOUND CAME! FINALLY, HE COULD STAND IT NO LONGER! HE UNBOLTED IT AND SWUNG IT OPEN...
EMILY! IF YOU DON'T COME UP RIGHT NOW, I'M COMING DOWN TO GET YOU!
EMILY DID NOT ANSWER! A FETID ODOR BURNED SILAS'S NOSTRILS! HE CALLED AGAIN! STILL NO ANSWER! HE SHOUTED ANGRILY...
EMILY! STOP PLAYING! ANSWER ME!
A RAT SCURRIED ACROSS THE CELLAR FLOOR! THE STAIRS CREAKED AN OBJECTION AS SILAS DESCENDED SLOWLY...
EMILY! SO HELP ME... I'LL.. GOOD LORD!
EMILY WAS DEAD! AN OPENED JAR OF HOME-CANNED FOOD LAY BESIDE HER CHALK-WHITE BODY! ITS CONTENTS HAD BEEN HALF EATEN! THE ACID SMELL WAS STRONG! IT CAME FROM THE JAR...
THE FOOD! IT..IT SPOILED! SHE'S BEEN POISONED! SHE. SHE'S DEAD!

FEAR CLUTCHED AT SILAS'S HEART! HOW COULD HE EXPLAIN EMILY'S DEATH? THERE WAS ONLY ONE THING TO DO! SILAS GOT A SPADE AND DUG A SHALLOW GRAVE IN THE BARE PASSAGEWAY, BETWEEN THE PILES OF JUNK...

I'LL SAY SHE WENT ON A *TRIP*! NO! SHE *LEFT* ME...

SILAS DRAGGED EMILY'S BODY TO HER CELLAR GRAVE AND PUSHED HER IN! HE PITCHED THE CRAWLING DIRT DOWN UPON HER WHITE FACE

THAT'S IT! SHE *LEFT* ME! SHE GOT *DISGUSTED* WITH THE *WAY I KEPT THE CELLAR!*

AND SO, EMILY'S BODY WAS ADDED TO THE CLUTTER OF JUNK THAT FILLED THE CELLAR! OTHER BODIES WERE THERE, TOO! THE REMAINS OF AN UNFORTUNATE MOUSE THAT HAD FEASTED ON POISONED RODENT-KILLER AND HAD CRAWLED INTO A PILE OF EMPTY CANS ROTTED THERE...

IN SILAS'S CLUMSY EFFORTS TO BURY POOR EMILY, HE'D KICKED OVER THE SPOILED JAR OF FOOD! HE'D LEFT IT LAY AND A STRAY CAT THAT HAD WANDERED INTO THE CELLAR BY SOME OBSCURE OPENING HAD TASTED THE SPILLED CONTENTS! IT, TOO, LAY DECAYING UNDER A WORM-EATEN PILLOW...

SILAS RARELY CAME DOWN TO THE CELLAR AFTER EMILY'S DEATH! THE SICKENING STENCH FROM BELOW GREW STRONGER AND STRONGER! AS WINTER DREW NEAR AND THE HOUSE GREW COLD, SILAS WAS FORCED TO GO DOWN TO START THE FURNACE...

PHEW! I OUGHT TO GET SOME QUICK-LIME AND SPREAD IT OVER THE SPOT WHERE I BURIED EMILY!

THE FURNACE WAS FAULTY... ITS BOILER LEAKED! A STEADY DRIP-DRIP-DRIP OF WARM WATER RAN DOWN FROM IT... ALONG THE SOIL-FLOOR PASSAGE... AND SEEPED INTO THE GROUND NEAR EMILY'S GRAVE...

AND SOMEHOW... AS IN A PREHISTORIC SWAMP, LONG, LONG AGO... THE WARMTH OF THE FURNACE, THE MOISTURE, THE DECAYING JUNK, THE ROTTED REMAINS OF CAT, MOUSE, AND EMILY... ALL OF THE STRANGE AND UNKNOWN CONDITIONS NEEDED FOR THE CREATION OF LIVING MATTER CAME ABOUT! A SMALL, PULSATING POOL OF QUIVERING LIFE SPREAD OVER THE DANK CROWDED CELLAR FLOOR...

LITTLE BY LITTLE, THE THROBBING THING ABSORBED THE JUNK AROUND IT! THE OLD CANARY CAGE SUNK SLOWLY INTO THE LIVID, GULPING MASS, DISSOLVING AS IF IT WERE MADE OF SPUN SUGAR...

THE PILES AND PILES OF MAGAZINES AND BOOKS SLIPPED INTO THE SUCKING GLOB AND DISAPPEARED...INTERGRATED INTO IT! THE PHONOGRAPH..

...THE BUNDLES OF OLD CLOTHES...THE DECAYING CHAIR...THE BOTTLES AND JARS ..ALL MELTED AWAY! AND THE THING GREW ..

THE RUSTED LAMPS..THE BROKEN SPRINGS AND TORN MATTRESSES...THE BUCKETS OF DRIED PAINT AND MILDEWED WALL PAPER... THE TRUNKS! THE GROWING, QUIVERING MASS SWALLOWED THEM ALL...

THE SHOES..THE OLD RUG.. THE CARTONS...EVERYTHING! THE CELLAR.. THE *ENTIRE CONTENTS* OF THE CELLAR WAS FUSED INTO *ONE SHIVERING, VIBRATING MASS OF LIVING OOZE...*

AND STILL IT CONTINUES TO GROW! THE CELLAR STAIRS WENT NEXT! THE GULPING PASTY MASS SUCKED THEM IN AS FAR UP AS IT COULD REACH! THE PILLARS THAT HELD THE STAIRS HUNG CRAZILY, TOO...THEIR BASES ABSORBED OUT FROM UNDER THEM

UPSTAIRS, SILAS SHUDDERED. A CRAWLING SENSATION OF HORROR CREPT UP HIS SPINE! HE STOOD UP! HE STARED AT THE CELLAR DOOR! FROM BEYOND IT, A RUSTLING, ROLLING SOUND CAME THROUGH .

SOMETHING *SOMETHING'S DOWN THERE! SOMETHING MOVING! SOMETHING ALIVE!*

SILAS UNBOLTED THE CELLAR DOOR AND FLUNG IT OPEN! HE STARED INTO THE DARKNESS BELOW HIM...

WHO...WHO'S DOWN THERE?

HE TOOK THE KEROSENE LAMP FROM ITS HOOK ON THE WALL AND LIT IT! ITS EERIE GLOW REFLECTED UPWARD FROM THE THROBBING, PULSATING THING DOWNSTAIRS...

WHAT...WHAT IS IT? WHAT'S DOWN THERE?

SILAS TOOK ONE STEP DOWNWARD! HIS WEIGHT SPLINTERED THE UNSUPPORTED STAIRS! AS HE FELL FORWARD, HE SCREAMED HYSTERICALLY...

YAAAAAAAAAEEEE!

THE THING ENVELOPED SILAS...DISSOLVING THE FLESH FROM HIS BONES! HIS SHRIEKS OF PAIN DIED TO A WHIMPER AND THEN SIGHED TO SILENCE! SILAS'S CLAWING CLUTCHING HAND WAS LAST TO SINK SLOWLY INTO THE QUIVERING GOO...

THE KEROSENE LAMP SPILLED ITS INFLAMMABLE CONTENTS OUT OVER THE LIVING CELLAR POOL AND IT BEGAN TO BLAZE! A NAUSEATING ODOR OF SEARED, CHARRED FLESH FILLED THE HOUSE! SOON THE ENTIRE STRUCTURE WAS ABLAZE...THE HOT FLAMES LEAPING WILDLY...

LOOK! GOLLY! OLD MISER THORNTON'S PLACE! IT'S BURNING DOWN!

IN THE MORNING, ONLY A BLACKENED SKELETON OF THE HOUSE REMAINED! EVERYTHING WITHIN HAD BEEN COMPLETELY DESTROYED! THE CHILDREN OF THE ORPHANAGE PEERED AT IT THROUGH THE SPIKED FENCE...SAD-EYED...

GEE! ALL THOSE WONDERFUL THINGS IN HIS CELLAR!

BURNED UP! GONE!

AND WE COULD HAVE USED THEM, TOO!

HEE, HEE! THAT'S MY SERVING OF *HORROR*, KIDDIES! I HOPE IT WAS *TASTY* ENOUGH FOR YOU! SO POOR OLD SILAS FINALLY WOUND UP AS *PART* OF THE *JUNK* IN HIS CELLAR, EH? HE MADE A *TRASH* OF HIMSELF IN THE *END*! HEE, HEE! WELL, THAT'S WHAT HE *DISSOLVED*! OH, BY THE WAY! *YOUR* KNEES WILL DISSOLVE WHEN YOU GET MY 5X7 ACTUAL PHOTO! READ MY COLUMN, *THE OLD WITCH'S NICHE*, TO FIND OUT HOW TO GET IT! AND NOW I'LL TURN YOU OVER TO THAT OLD *GARBAGE COLLECTOR, THE VAULT-KEEPER*! HE'S WAITING WITH A *SAMPLE* FROM HIS *COLLECTION*! SEE YOU LATER!

THE VAULT OF HORROR!

HEH, HEH! THIS IS YOUR HOST IN *THE VAULT OF HORROR*...*THE VAULT-KEEPER*...*SPOOKING!* NOW THAT THE *OLD WITCH* HAS FINISHED WITH HER PANTY-WAIST YARN (CELLARS! PWEW!)... I'LL TELL YOU A *REAL HORROR STORY!* THIS IS ONE THAT WILL MAKE YOUR *HAIR STAND RIGHT UP ON END* (IF YOU HAVE ANY *LEFT!* (STEADY E C READERS *DON'T*))! IT WAS TOLD TO ME BY A RATHER *'ATTRACTIVE'* YOUNG WOMAN! HERE IT IS IN HER *OWN WORDS!* SHE CALLS THIS *SHIVERY TALE*...

THE ACID TEST!

FLORENCE BLAIR! THAT'S MY NAME! I MARRIED CEDRIC BLAIR TWO YEARS AGO! HE MADE A BIG FUSS OVER ME AFTER WE WERE INTRODUCED, AND WHEN HE ASKED ME TO MARRY HIM, I CONSENTED! I GUESS HE INFLATED MY FEMALE EGO WITH HIS DEVOTION! ANYWAY HE WAS THE ONLY JERK WHO'D EVER POPPED THE QUESTION, AND I WAS SICK AND TIRED OF SCRATCHING A STENO PAD AT THE TIME...SO WE GOT HITCHED...

YEAH, HE WAS CONSIDERATE, ALL RIGHT! SO DISGUSTINGLY CONSIDERATE THAT AFTER A COUPLE OF MONTHS OF MARRIAGE, HIS SLUSHY ATTENTION BEGAN TO GRATE ON MY NERVES! HE WAS THE PERFECT GENTLEMAN... THE SLOB! HE TREATED ME AS IF I WAS ABOUT TO HAVE A BABY THE FOLLOWING WEEK..
WAIT, HONEY! DON'T SIT DOWN YET! LET ME GET YOU A CUSHION!
OH.. THANK YOU, DEAR!
OH, SURE! AT FIRST IT WAS REAL NICE! HE'D SCURRY AROUND THE APARTMENT GETTING ME WHATEVER I WANTED! ALL I'D HAVE TO DO WAS JUST CASUALLY MENTION IT...
WHEW.. IT'S HOT! MMMMM! A COLD DRINK'D SURE HIT THE SPOT RIGHT NOW!
WOULD YOU LIKE ONE, SWEETHEART! I'LL GET IT FOR YOU! JUST YOU SIT RIGHT THERE!
YOU'RE PROBABLY SNEERING... SAYING, 'WHAT'S THIS BROAD COMPLAINING ABOUT? SOME WOMEN WOULD GIVE THEIR LEFT ARM FOR A HUSBAND LIKE THAT!' WELL, TAKE IT FROM ME, KID! IT CAN BORE YOU... IT CAN BORE YOU STIFF...
IS IT TOO HOT FOR YOU, LAMB PIE? SHALL I GET THE FAN?
AW, NEVER MIND, GEDRIC!
YOU JUST GO RIGHT INTO THE LIVING ROOM AND REST, BABY! I'LL DO THE DISHES TONIGHT!
THANKS...
YOU DUMB SLOB!
TOO COOL FOR YOU, SUGAR? CAN I GET YOU A SHAWL? TURN UP THE HEAT? HUH?
1 2 3 4 5 6
OH LORD!
OH, LORD! IS RIGHT! AFTER A WHILE HE JUST STARTED TO RUB ME THE WRONG WAY! HE HOVERED ABOUT ME LIKE A MOSQUITO.. DOING THIS.. GETTING THAT! SOMETIMES I JUST GRITTED MY TEETH AND PRAYED HE'D HAUL OFF AND SOCK ME ONE... JUST FOR A CHANGE...
SHOES HURT, DARLING? CAN I GET YOU YOUR BEDROOM SLIPPERS? HUH? IS THERE ANYTHING YOU WANT?
YEAH! JUST SIT THERE AN' SHUT UP... YOU CREEP!
NO, DEAR! NOTHING!
IT GOT SO I USED TO PROVOKE ARGUMENTS WITH HIM, ANYTHING FOR A LITTLE DIVERSION! BUT EVEN THAT DIDN'T WORK! HE'D CLAM UP WHILE I RAVED AND THEN COME UP TO ME, SMILE SWEETLY... AND (I COULD'VE KILLED HIM FOR IT).. APOLOGIZE..
I WAS WRONG, FLORENCE! DON'T LET'S ARGUE! I'LL BE CAREFUL NEXT TIME! FORGIVE ME, PLEASE?
OKAY! OKAY!
THE JERK! HE DIDN'T EVEN DO ANYTHING!
2

IT WAS LIKE THAT FOR A WHOLE YEAR! ON OUR ANNIVERSARY HE BROUGHT ME A BOUQUET OF FLOWERS AND WE SAT AROUND ALL NIGHT... HIM WISTFULLY REVIEWING EVERY DELIGHTFUL MOMENT OF OUR PAST YEAR TOGETHER... AND ME DYING BY DEGREES...
...AND THE TIME YOU FORGOT TO TAKE THE MILK IN! SIX QUARTS! ALL SOUR!
FOR GOD'S SAKE, CEDRIC!
HUH?
SHUT UP!
FLORENCE? WHAT'S WRONG?
LOOK AT US! WE NEVER GO ANYWHERE! WE JUST SIT HERE... NIGHT AFTER NIGHT!
THAT'S ALL I HAD TO SAY! AFTER THAT HE STARTED TAKING ME OUT TWICE...SOMETIMES THREE TIMES A WEEK! THE NIGHT OUT USUALLY CONSISTED OF A TWO-BIT MOVIE SHOW AND ICE CREAM IN A TEEN-AGER-JAMMED FOUNTAIN AFTERWARDS! TWO MONTHS OF THAT WAS ABOUT ALL I COULD STAND...
WHY, FLORENCE! IT'S SATURDAY NIGHT! YOU'RE NOT DRESSED!
AREN'T YOU CLEVER!
AREN'T WE GOING OUT?
NOT ME, BUSTER! NOT TO ANOTHER OF THOSE MISERABLE MOVIES! I'M SICK OF THEM! DO YOU HEAR? SICK OF THEM!
BUT DO YOU THINK HE GOT MAD? DO YOU THINK HE BLEW UP? OH, NO! NOT CEDRIC! NOT SWEET, DEVOTED, LOVE-SICK CEDRIC! HE CAME OVER TO ME, PATTED MY CHEEK AFFECTIONATELY...(I HAD TO CLENCH MY FISTS SO'S NOT TO SCRATCH HIS EYES OUT). AND DRIBBLED...
I DIDN'T KNOW YOU WERE BORED, SWEETIE PIE! WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY SOMETHING BEFORE THIS? WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO? JUST SAY THE WORD!
A NIGHT CLUB? A BIG, EXPENSIVE NIGHT CLUB!
HE TOOK ME! HE MUST'VE GONE INTO HOCK GOOD PAYING THE CHECK THEY SLAPPED HIM WITH! I DIDN'T CARE! AT LEAST IT WAS A CHANGE...
IT MUST HAVE COST A LOT TONIGHT, HUH, CEDRIC?
IT DOESN'T MATTER, DEAREST! AS LONG AS YOU ENJOYED YOURSELF!
3

AND THEN IT HAPPENED! IT WAS ABOUT THREE MONTHS AGO! I'D BOUGHT A BOTTLE OF MURIATIC ACID TO CLEAN SOME STAINS OFF THE BATHTUB! THAT STUFF IS REALLY POWERFUL! YOU HAVE TO USE RUBBER GLOVES OR IT'LL BURN YOUR SKIN OFF! ANYWAY, THERE I WAS, SCRUBBING AWAY, WHEN...
HELLO, DARLING! I'M HOME EARLY TONIGHT!
HOW NAUSEATING!
HELLO, CEDRIC! I'M IN HERE!
FLORENCE! WHAT ARE YOU DOING? OH, DEAR! I HATE TO SEE YOU ON YOUR HANDS AND KNEES LIKE THAT! HERE! LET ME DO IT!
COME ON! OUT IT! I'LL BE THROUGH SOON!
HERE, DARLING! GIVE ME THAT BOTTLE! I'LL FINISH UP! YOU GO REST!
LET GO, CEDRIC! I SAID I'LL BE THROUGH SOON!
YOU KNOW HOW I DISLIKE SEEING YOU WORK, LAMBEY PIE! GIVE ME THE BOTTLE!
CEDRIC! SO HELP ME...
SUDDENLY I SAW RED! I LOOKED AT HIS COCKER-SPANIEL FACE... WITH THOSE SAD EYES AND ANGELIC EXPRESSION... AND I SAW RED...
COME ON, SWEET! GIVE IT TO ME, NOW!
ALL RIGHT.
MY FACE WAS HOT! I COULD FEEL THE BLOOD POUNDING IN MY CHEEKS! ALL OF MY HATRED AND REPULSION TOWARD CEDRIC WELLED UP INSIDE ME AND FINALLY EXPLODED! I FLUNG THE OPEN BOTTLE OF ACID INTO THAT DISGUSTING, PASTY, DRY-SMILING FACE...
HERE! TAKE IT!
TAKE IT!
FLORENCE!
LORD, HE SCREAMED! THE STUFF WENT INTO HIS EYES... DRIPPED DOWN HIS CHEEKS... FROTHED ON HIS LIPS! HE FELL ON HIS KNEES, STARING AT ME WITH BLOODSHOT EYES, AND SCREAMED...
Y-A-A-A-A-A-A-A-H-H

WHEN THE AMBULANCE CAME, THEY TOOK CEDRIC AWAY I HEARD SOME TALK ABOUT DISFIGUREMENT AND BEING BLINDED FOR LIFE, BUT I WAS TOO DAZED TO UNDERSTAND! I FINALLY WAS JOLTED OUT OF MY SPINNING WORLD BY A HEAVY HAND ON MY SHOULDER...
C'MON ALONG, MRS. BLAIR! YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!
THEY TOOK ME DOWN TO THE POLICE STATION AND BOOKED ME! THEY CHARGED ME WITH ASSAULT! THEY SAID I'D HAVE TO STAND TRIAL! THEN THEY PUT ME BEHIND BARS! A COUPLE OF HOURS LATER, A GREASY LOOKING GUY CAME TO MY CELL...
GOOD EVENING, MRS. BLAIR! I'M YOUR LAWYER! I'VE BEEN ASSIGNED BY THE STATE TO DEFEND YOU!
GO ON! SCRAM! HOW YOU GONNA DEFEND ME? I DID IT, DIDN'T I?
HE GOT REAL CLOSE! I COULD SMELL THE LIQUOR ON HIS BREATH
DON'T BE A FOOL, MRS. BLAIR! I'VE BEEN TO SEE YOUR HUSBAND... IN THE HOSPITAL!
I HOPE HE DROPS DEAD!
HE'S BADLY BURNED, BUT HE'S ALL RIGHT!
TOO BAD!
HE STILL LOVES YOU, MRS. BLAIR! DO YOU REALIZE WHAT THAT MEANS?
HUH? HE... HE MAYBE YOU'D BETTER START TALKING SENSE, BUDDY!
THE GREASY LAWYER TALKED! AND HE MADE GOOD SENSE! CEDRIC, THE STUPID FOOL, COULDN'T BELIEVE I'D DASHED THE ACID IN HIS FACE ON PURPOSE! IN FACT, HE WAS GOING TO PLEAD FOR ME AT THE TRIAL...
HE WHAT? HE'S GOING TO ASK THEM TO LET ME OFF!
THAT'S RIGHT! HE THINKS IT WAS JUST A LITTLE TEMPER FLAIR-UP, AND THE ACID WAS UNFORTUNATELY IN YOUR HANDS AT THE TIME!
CEDRIC! LOVE-SICK, DEVOTED, CONSIDERATE CEDRIC! HE JUST COULDN'T BELIEVE THAT I HATED HIM ENOUGH TO SPLATTER HIM DELIBERATELY WITH ACID...
THE FOOL! THE IDIOT! I...
JUST PLAY ALONG, MRS. BLAIR! ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS ACT REPENTANT! SHOW THE JURY IT WAS JUST A LOVER'S QUARREL!
3

I DIDN'T RELISH THE THOUGHT OF GOING TO JAIL FOR A COUPLE OF YEARS, SO I AGREED TO DO WHAT THE MOUTHPIECE WANTED! AT THE TRIAL, CEDRIC WAS WANTED IN BANDAGES! HE'D BEEN BLINDED BY THE ACID! BUT IT WAS THE SAME OLD SICKENING CEDRIC.

I LOVE THIS WOMAN...AND *SHE* LOVES *ME!* I *BEG* YOU! LET HER *GO!* I *NEED* HER NOW! WHAT SHE HAS *DONE*, SHE WILL SUFFER FOR...FOR THE *REST* OF HER LIFE! SHE WILL HAVE TO GAZE ON *MY FACE*... SHE WILL HAVE TO SEE *DAILY* WHAT SHE HAS *DONE!*

THE DUMB SLOB! AS IF I'D HANG AROUND ONCE I WAS ACQUITTED! BUT I PLAYED ALONG! I PUT ON A GOOD ACT...

WHAT MATTERS THE MOST IS THAT MY HUSBAND STILL LOVES ME! THAT'S ALL THAT COUNTS! YOU CAN PUNISH ME FOR MY MISTAKE IF YOU LIKE! ONLY.. SOB...SOB...KNOWING CEDRIC... SOB...FORGIVES ME...IS ALL...SOB... THAT MATTERS!

THE AMBULANCE CHASER JUST KEPT NODDING HIS HEAD AND SMILING WHILE I POURED OUT THE TEARS! I WAS *SENSATIONAL!* WHY, ONE BROAD IN THE JURY EVEN STARTED TO BAWL, I WAS SO CONVINCING! WHEN THE VERDICT CAME IN...

WE, THE JURY, FIND THE DEFENDANT...*NOT GUILTY!*

THE LAWYER WAS SHAKING MY HAND AND CEDRIC WAS AT MY SIDE, STUMBLING AROUND, CLAWING AT MY SLEEVE...

COME HOME NOW, FLORENCE! IT'S ALL OVER!

Y...YEAH, CEDRIC!

I LOOKED AT THE LAWYER QUESTIONINGLY! HE BENT OVER AND WHISPERED...

YOU'D BETTER GO ALONG! MAKE IT *LOOK GOOD!*

YEAH! I GET IT!

COME, CEDRIC, DEAR! I'LL TAKE YOU HOME!

WHEN WE GOT TO THE APARTMENT, CEDRIC SAT DOWN WEARILY...STARING BLANKLY AHEAD THROUGH THE SMOKED GLASSES TAPED ON HIS BANDAGED HEAD...

CAN I GET YOU SOMETHING, CEDRIC!

NO, FLORENCE! JUST COME SIT BY ME FOR A WHILE!

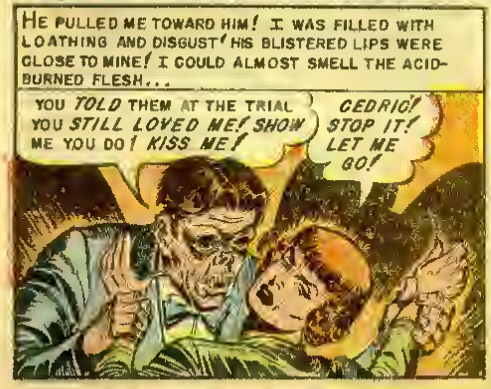
HE TOOK MY HAND IN HIS! A COLD SHIVER CRAWLED UP MY SPINE AT HIS CLAMMY TOUCH! I TRIED TO DRAW MY HAND AWAY, BUT HE HELD IT FAST! I NEVER KNEW HE WAS SO STRONG...

CEDRIC! I...

WHAT'S WRONG, FLORENCE? AM I *REPULSIVE* TO YOU? WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE WHAT YOU *DID* TO ME?

HE STARTED TO UNWIND THE BANDAGES WITH HIS FREE HAND! I LOOKED AWAY! HIS FINGERS DUG INTO MY WRISTS...
YOU'RE NOT LOOKING AT ME, FLORENCE! I CAN TELL! LOOK AT ME! SEE WHAT YOU DID?
NO, CEDRIC! NO! I... I

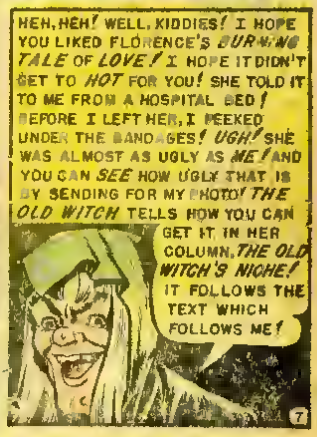
THEN I LOOKED! MY GOD, I LOOKED! I ALMOST THREW UP AT WHAT I SAW! HIS FACE WAS HORRIBLY DISTORTED.. HIS SKIN BURNED AND SCARRED...HIS EYES, TWO BLACK HOLES...
PRETTY, ISN'T IT, FLORENCE? TELL ME YOU STILL LOVE ME, FLORENCE! TELL ME!
CEDRIC! PLEASE! PLEASE!


HE PULLED ME TOWARD HIM! I WAS FILLED WITH LOATHING AND DISGUST! HIS BLISTERED LIPS WERE CLOSE TO MINE! I COULD ALMOST SMELL THE ACID-BURNED FLESH...
YOU TOLD THEM AT THE TRIAL YOU STILL LOVED ME! SHOW ME YOU DO! KISS ME!
CEDRIC! STOP IT! LET ME GO!

HE HELD MY HANDS IN A VICE-LIKE GRIP! I COULDN'T GET LOOSE! WITH HIS FREE HAND HE REACHED INTO HIS POCKET AND PULLED OUT A BOTTLE...A BOTTLE OF MURIATIC ACID...
DO YOU KNOW WHY I PLEADED FOR YOU AT THE TRIAL, FLORENCE? BECAUSE I DIDN'T WANT THEM TO PUT YOU IN JAIL! THEN I COULDN'T HAVE MY REVENGE!
CEDRIC! OH, LORD..

HE PUT THE NECK OF THE BOTTLE INTO HIS SCARRED DISFIGURED MOUTH AND UNSCREWED THE CAP! HE SPAT IT OUT, LAUGHING...
IT'LL BE NICE HERE, FLORENCE! JUST THE TWO OF US...TOGETHER! JUST LIKE IT WAS... BEFORE...

THE ACID SPLASHED INTO MY FACE, BURNING THE SKIN! RED-HOT FLAMES SEEMED TO LICK AT MY CHEEKS! SEARING POKERS KNIFED INTO MY EYES! AS THE BLACKNESS CLOSED IN, CEDRIC'S FACE CAME AT ME... HIS SIGHTLESS EYES SMILING! HIS BLISTERED LIPS CLOSED ON MINE AS I PASSED OUT SCREAMING...
EEEEE EEEE MPH


HEH, HEH! WELL, KIDDIES! I HOPE YOU LIKED FLORENCE'S BURNING TALE OF LOVE! I HOPE IT DIDN'T GET TO HOT FOR YOU! SHE TOLD IT TO ME FROM A HOSPITAL BED! BEFORE I LEFT HER, I PEEKED UNDER THE BANDAGES! UGH! SHE WAS ALMOST AS UGLY AS ME! AND YOU CAN SEE HOW UGLY THAT IS BY SENDING FOR MY PHOTO! THE OLD WITCH TELLS HOW YOU CAN GET IT IN HER COLUMN, THE OLD WITCH'S NICHE! IT FOLLOWS THE TEXT WHICH FOLLOWS ME!

NIGHTMARE!

This last week had been a *nightmare,* John Bradbury thought to himself as he lay taut and sleepless in the darkened bedroom. Ever since he had brought his young bride to their new home, a ghastly succession of events had transpired . . . events so horrible that John Bradbury was beginning to question his own sanity.

First there had been the *canary* . . . its cage smashed open and its neck mangled! Bradbury had decided with a shudder that the cat had gotten to it. *That* theory had survived for just one night! Then the cat, itself, had been discovered in the basement . . . its throat ripped open and the blood drained from the grotesque corpse!

For three nerve-wracking days, he and Ruth had closely watched their Airedale. It must have been *Tippy,* Bradbury concluded with revulsion . . . he had suggested destroying the dog immediately, but it was Ruth's animal and tearfully she defended it. She had beseeched him to wait . . . couldn't they allow time for Tippy's innocence to manifest itself?

And then, just the night before, Bradbury had been awakened in the early hours of the morning by Ruth's hideous screams. There, in the hallway, not more than a yard from their own bedroom, was the dog's fast-stiffening body . . . on its throat the terrible evidence of a vampire's teeth!

It had been a week of nightmare, John Bradbury thought to himself, as he lay stiff and sleepless in the darkened room. The cat and the canary and the dog . . all victims of a force which was too gruesome for the human mind to comprehend. Some awful power held this house in its grasp . . or was the perpetrator of these harrowing incidents someone who lived *here?* With a choking sob John Bradbury thrust the thought from his mind . . . there must be some *other* explanation!

A sudden sound electrified him: the door knob was turning and a glimmer from the hallway probed into the bedroom. He felt the tension pressing in around him like a smothering shroud . . . there, walking towards him and looking almost ghostly in the eerie light, was Ruth Bradbury.

Suddenly the terrible truth was so obvious that it was all Bradbury could do to restrain himself from shouting it aloud. The *vampire* . . . the ghoulish monster who swallowed its victim's blood . . . must be his *own wife!* There could be no other explanation . . . and she was coming now to claim her next victim!

Now she was peering down at him with glittering eyes and, in that moment, he sat bolt upright in bed, no longer able to feign sleep. Fear such as he had never known before shuddered through his body and set his limbs atremble. Ruth's face was coming closer and closer . . .

In that second of supreme desperation his mind went blank and he felt himself whirling helplessly down a long murky corridor . . . spinning . . careening wildly. It may have been seconds later . . . or could it have been aeons? . . . that he recovered consciousness. There had been a strange familiarity to his blanking-out . . . was it possible that Ruth had been poisoning or doping him in order to get him out of the way?

Slowly he opened his eyes. There, at the foot of the bed, Ruth leered at him . . . her mouth twisted in a savage leer. On her throat were the unmistakable marks of the savage VAMPIRE!

And on the trembling fingers which John Bradbury held before his unbelieving eyes was the warm sticky blood of his latest victim . . . the blood which he must have wiped from his lips just seconds after he had n[illegible] own wife!

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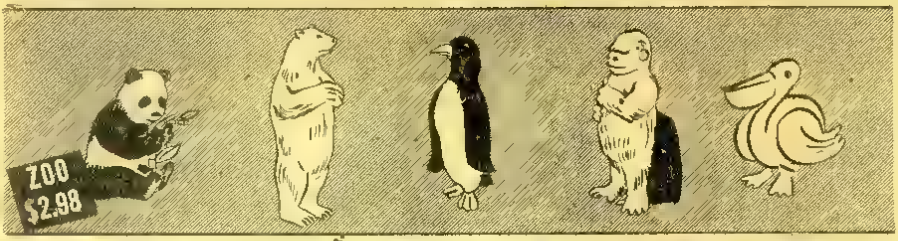

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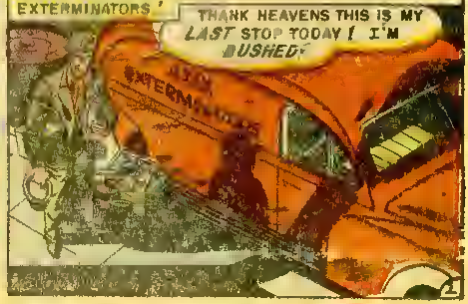
HERE'S A TALE THAT SHOULD DRIVE YOU BUGS! I CALL IT...

EXTERMINATION

RALPH SLAMMED HARD ON THE BRAKES AND HIS SMALL PANEL TRUCK SQUEALED TO A STOP BEFORE THE WHITE HOUSE! HE STEPPED OUT, SQUINTING AT THE BRASS NUMBERS TACKED ON THE FRONT DOOR OF THE DWELLING, AND SMILED.

RALPH SIGHED WEARILY AS HE MADE HIS WAY BACK TO THE REAR OF THE TRUCK, UNLATCHED THE TWO DOORS, AND PULLED THEM TOWARD HIM! INSIDE, A CLUTTER OF CANS, BOXES, TANKS, HOSES, PUMPS, AND OTHER ASSORTED EQUIPMENT LAY STACKED NEATLY! ON THE SIDES OF THE TRUCK, IN LARGE SCREAMING LETTERS, WERE THE WORDS, 'AJAX EXTERMINATORS'



A WIDE-EYED, PALE-FACED, MIDDLE-AGED WOMAN PEERED AT RALPH FROM BEHIND THE CURTAINS AS HE MOVED UP THE WALK TO THE FRONT DOOR. RALPH GRINNED BACK AT HER AND SHE DISAPPEARED! THEN THE DOOR OPENED AND SHE STOOD THERE EMBARRASSED..

GOODNESS GRACIOUS! DID YOU *HAVE* TO PARK YOUR TRUCK RIGHT IN *FRONT?* NOW ALL THE *NEIGHBORS* WILL KNOW!

HUH? AW, COME ON, LADY! IT AIN'T NO *CRIME* TO HAVE *BED-BUGS!*

THE WOMAN'S FINGER SHOT TO HER LIPS AND SHE LOOKED UP AND DOWN THE STREET, HER FACE FLUSHING BEET-RED

SH-H-H-H! DON'T *TALK* SO LOUD! SOMEONE WILL *HEAR* YOU! COME IN!

YEAH! WHERE'S THE BEDROOM, HUH?

THE WHITE-FACED LADY CLOSED THE DOOR BEHIND RALPH AND TOOK ONE LAST LOOK OUT OF THE CURTAINED WINDOW! THEN SHE POINTED A THIN ARM...

IN THERE! IS IT GOING TO SMELL?

DON'T KNOW YET! GOTTA SEE FIRST!

RALPH STAMPED INTO THE BEDROOM AND APPROACHED THE BED! HE FLUNG THE MATTRESS BACK AND STUDIED IT CAREFULLY..

YEAH, YOU GOT 'EM, LADY! BUT *GOOD!*

I KNOW! THEY..THEY *BITE!*

BITE! THEY SUCK YOUR BLOOD, THAT'S WHAT THEY DO! LOOKS LIKE THEY'RE IN THE TUFTS AND FOLDS OF THIS MATTRESS!

CAN YOU KILL THEM?

ARE YOU *KIDDING*, LADY? DIDN'T YOU READ THE *SIGN* ON MY TRUCK? *I'VE KILLED MORE BED-BUGS, ROACHES, ANTS, RATS, MICE, MOTHS, TERMITES AND OTHER PESTS THAN ANY OTHER EXTERMINATOR IN THIS TOWN!*

YOU SAY THAT.. LIKE LIKE YOU *ENJOY* KILLING THEM!

THE SMILE FADED ON RALPH'S FACE AND HIS EYES GREW DARK! HE GRIMACED AT THE INFESTED MATTRESS..ANGRILY...

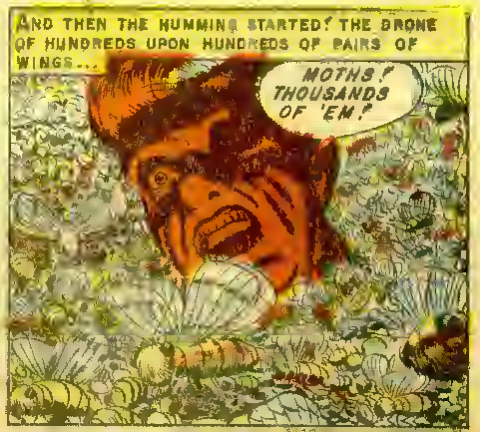
YOU *BET* I ENJOY KILLING 'EM! I *HATE* 'EM! *HATE 'EM!*

ER...AH...YES! I...I SEE! ER, HOW DO YOU *KILL* BED-BUGS, MR.. MR..

FOR A MOMENT, RALPH WAS SILENT, STARING AT THE BED WITH WIDE GLARING EYES! THEN THE CLOUD LIFTED FROM HIS FACE AND HE SMILED...
HUH? OH! MY NAME'S RALPH MELLON! YOU CAN CALL ME RALPH, LADY!
HOW DO YOU KILL BED-BUGS, RALPH?
ALL ACCORDING! IF THEY'RE INSIDE THE MATTRESS, WE CAN STEAM 'EM OUT! THEY CAN'T TAKE ANYTHING OVER 125 DEGREES! AS FOR THE FOLDS AND TUFTS, A SPRAY OF DDT WILL WIPE 'EM OUT!
IN THE MATTRESS! OH, DEAR!
AW! YOU DON'T HAVE TO WORRY, LADY! THEY'RE NOT INSIDE THIS MATTRESS! I LOOKED IT OVER! WELL! GOTTA GET TO WORK!
WHILE RALPH BEGAN TO SPRAY THE MATTRESS WITH THE LETHAL DDT, HE CONTINUED TO CHATTER TO THE WOMAN...
TERMITES IS FUN TO KILL! YOU GIVE 'EM A CLOUD OF CYANIDE GAS! KNOCKS 'EM FOR A LOOP!
CYANIDE GAS?
YEP! GOOD FOR ANTS, TOO! NOW COCKROACHES IS TOUGHER! GOTTA DUST THEM WITH SODIUM FLUORIDE OR POWDERED BORAX TO KILL 'EM!
UGH! I HATE COCKROACHES!
RATS! THEY'RE THE HARDEST! THEY'RE SMART...THOSE BABIES! POISONED BAIT'S GOOD FOR THEM UNTIL THEY GET WISE AND AVOID IT! THEN YOU GOTTA CHANGE THE BAIT... AND THE POISON!
YOU MEAN THEY KNOW AFTER A WHILE?
YOU SAID IT! THEY'RE SMART! ONCE I MADE AN ELECTRIC TRAP...YOU KNOW: KILL 'EM WITH AN ELECTRIC SNOCK! GOT ONE THAT'S ALL! THE REST OF 'EM STEERED CLEAR! ONLY GOT ONE WHEREVER I WENT WITH THE THING! AFTER ONE IN EVERY PLACE... THEY KNEW!
DEAR ME! I NEVER KNEW THERE WAS SO MUCH TO EXTERMINATING PESTS!

RALPH PUT THE DOT BOMB INTO HIS KIT AND LIT A CIGARETTE! HIS EYES SPARKLED, AS IF HE'D JUST SEEN THROUGH A DELIGHTFUL EXPERIENCE...
YEP! THERE'S PLENTY TO EXTERMINATIN'! BUT I LOVE IT!
YOU . YOU LOVE IT?
RALPH'S FACE BRIGHTENED! HE BEAMED...
YEAH! I LIKE TO KILL 'EM! IT MAKES ME FEEL GOOD! I MUSTA KILLED.. MAYBE... A THOUSAND BED-BUGS...JUST NOW!
A THOUSAND! ..GASP!
HIS EYES WERE WIDE AND STARING NOW...
BET I'VE KILLED A MILLION COCKROACHES! TEN THOUSAND RATS! HALF-A-MILLION BED-BUGS...TEN MILLION ANTS...
ARE YOU FINISHED, RALPH?
THAT NIGHT, WHEN RALPH MELLON...EXTERMINATOR, GOT HOME, HE SUNK WEARILY INTO A CHAIR! HE SAT THERE FOR A WHILE STARING BLANKLY AHEAD OF HIM! THEN HE BURST OUT LAUGHING...
CRAZY DAME! CALLED ME A SADIST! SAID I LIKE TO INFLICT PAIN ON OTHER CREATURES! AS IF A BUG CAN FEEL ANY PAIN!
RALPH SAT THERE FOR A WHILE, CHUCKLING! THEN A MOVEMENT CAUGHT HIS EYE! SOMETHING MOVING ACROSS THE FLOOR BEFORE HIM...
WHUZZAT? A COCKROACH!
RALPH JUMPED UP! HE STRODE OVER TO WHERE THE SLIMY BROWN COCKROACH HAD HESITATED ON THE FLOOR, SWEEPING ITS FEELERS ABOUT FROM RIGHT TO LEFT... AS IF IT SENSED IMPENDING DANGER! RALPH'S EYES GLARED! A CRUEL SMILE CROSSED HIS HARD FACE! HE RAISED HIS FOOT... SLOWLY...
IN A MINUTE, COCK-ROACH, YOU'RE GONNA BE MASHED MUSH!
RALPH BROUGHT DOWN HIS HEEL ON THE STICKY BROWN BACK OF THE ROACH, GRINDING THE INSECT INTO THE FLOOR! THE CRACKLE OF ITS SHELL-LIKE BODY WAS SUDDENLY DROWNED OUT BY AN EERIE, SPLITTING SHRIEK...
AAAAAAAAAAAAAA
GOOD LORD! THE ROACH! THE ROACH SCREAMED!

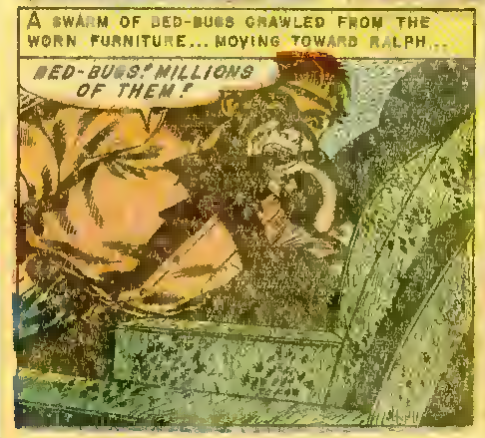
IT WAS AS IF THE SCREAM HAD BEEN A SIGNAL! SUDDENLY THE WALLS ABOUT RALPH WERE FILLED WITH THE SCRATCHING PATTER OF THOUSANDS OF CLAWED TOES...
WHAT'S THAT? RATS!


AND THEN THE HUMMING STARTED! THE DRONE OF HUNDREDS UPON HUNDREDS OF PAIRS OF WINGS...
MOTHS! THOUSANDS OF 'EM!

THEN THE TERMITES POURED FROM THE WOODWORK! MILLIONS OF THEM... STREAMING TOWARDS HIM...
TERMITES! THEY'RE AFTER ME!

AND THEN THE ROACHES AND THE ANTS CAME..FROM THE CRACKS IN THE FLOOR! THEY KEPT COMING... AND COMING..
I'VE GOT TO GET OUT OF HERE!

RALPH TURNED TO RUN, BUT TEN THOUSAND RATS BARRED THE WAY, THEIR KNIFE-LIKE TEETH GLEAMING...
OH, LORD! I'M SURROUNDED!


A SWARM OF BED-BUGS CRAWLED FROM THE WORN FURNITURE... MOVING TOWARD RALPH...
BED-BUGS! MILLIONS OF THEM!

THE HUMMING GREW DEAFENING! A CLOUD OF MOTHS HURLED AT RALPH, LANDING ON HIS ARMS, HIS LEGS, HIS BACK...
HELP! THEY'RE EATING AWAY MY CLOTHES!

RALPH STARTED TO RUN BUT THE RATS WERE UPON HIM! THEIR SLASHING TEETH CUT INTO HIS ANKLES! HE WENT SPRAWLING..
YAAAAAAAAAAAA!
THE BED-BUGS SWARMED OVER HIM, SUCKING HIS BLOOD...SUCKING...SUCKING! HE FELT WEAK..
EEEEEEEEEEEEEE
THE RATS, TEARING AT HIS FLESH...THE TERMITES, DRILLING INTO HIS BONES...THE ELECTRIFYING SENSATION OF THEIR BURROWING..
OH, LORD! THEY'RE KILLING ME!
AND THEN RALPH WAS AWAKE! HE SAT BOLT-UPRIGHT IN HIS CHAIR AND STARED ABOUT HIM! HE WAS COVERED WITH PERSPIRATION! HE BREATHED A SIGH OF RELIEF.
THANK GOD! IT WAS ONLY A DREAM...A HORRIBLE DREAM!
RALPH SAT THERE FOR A WHILE, CHUCKLING! THEN A MOVEMENT CAUGHT HIS EYE! SOMETHING MOVING ACROSS THE FLOOR BEFORE HIM...
HUH? WHUZZAT? A COCKROACH!
RALPH JUMPED UP ANGRILY! ALL HIS PENT-UP EMOTION FROM THE DREAM HE'D JUST EXPERIENCED SPILLED OVER! ENRAGED, HE STRODE TO WHERE THE SLIMY BROWN INSECT HAD HESITATED
SCREAMING COCKROACHES! BAH!
RALPH BROUGHT HIS HEEL DOWN ON THE STICKY BACK OF THE ROACH, GRINDING THE CRACKLING SHELL-LIKE BODY INTO THE FLOOR! SUDDENLY, FEAR CLUTCHED AT RALPH MELLON'S HEART... CRAWLING, COLD FEAR! THE COCKROACH WAS SHRIEKING..
GOOD LORD!
EEEAAAAAAAA!
WELL, KIDDIES! THIS IS WHERE WE CAME IN! I SUPPOSE WE LEAVE RALPH (AND HIS INEVITABLE END) TO THE BUGS...AND GO ON TO OTHER THINGS! LIKE FOR EXAMPLE, THE CRYPT-KEEPER...WHO IS WAITING TO TELL YOU HIS HORROR STORY! ER... WHAT'S THAT YOU ASK? WHAT HAPPENS TO RALPH? WHY IT'S SO SIMPLE! THE EXTERMINATOR GETS EXTERMINATED BY ALL THE PESTS HE ONCE PESTERED! DOESN'T THAT GIVE YOU A CRAW-W-WLY FEELING? IT'S SO...SO QUAINT! 'BYE, NOW!

THE CRYPT OF TERROR

HEH, HEH! YEP! IT'S YOUR *HOST IN HORROR, THE CRYPT-KEEPER,* AGAIN ... WELCOMING YOU TO *THE CRYPT OF TERROR!* COME IN! SIT DOWN NEXT TO ME AND I'LL 'ENTERTAIN' YOU WITH ONE OF MY *TERRORIZING TALES* GUARANTEED TO MAKE YOUR *BLOOD FREEZE* IN YOUR VEINS! THIS TIME I'VE CHOSEN, FROM MY JEALOUSLY GUARDED COLLECTION OF *BLOOD-CURDLERS,* A FAVORITE OF MINE CALLED...

EAR TODAY... GONE TOMORROW!

A GENTLE MARCH WIND SWEPT LIGHTLY OVER THE GRAVESTONES, CARESSING THEIR TIME-WORN FACES! BEYOND THE RUSTING IRON FENCE THAT KEPT INTRUDERS FROM DISTURBING THOSE WHO SLEPT BELOW THE THAWING GROUND, A RAMSHACKLE FACTORY BUILDING LOOMED... BLACK AND SILENT AGAINST A CHILLY GRAY SKY! ACROSS ITS PAINT-PEELED WALL, FADING LETTERS READ...

HEH, HEH! I SEE BY YOUR LEERING FACES, KIDDIES, THAT YOUR FIENDISH IMAGINATIONS ARE ALREADY RUNNING WILD FROM JUST READING THE FIRST PANEL! WELL, TAKE IT EASY, CRUMBS! IT'S MY STORY... NOT YOURS! TO GO ON...
IN THE OFFICE OF THE DURD AND UNGER FERTILIZER COMPANY, IRWIN DURD, THE SENIOR PARTNER, SHOUTED HOARSELY INTO A PHONE...
I TOLD YOU, SYE! YOU'LL GET YOUR MONEY! JUST GIVE ME A FEW MORE DAYS! THAT'S ALL I...
CLICK!
IRWIN TURNED... RED-FACED... AND STARED AT HIS JUNIOR PARTNER, ELLIOT UNGER...
HE HUNG UP ON ME!
WHAT? CALL HIM BACK!
IT'S NO USE, ELLIOT! IT WOULDN'T DO ANY GOOD! SYE JUST WON'T GIVE US ANY MORE CREDIT! HE WANTS TO BE PAID!
BUT, THIS ORDER! IF WE COULD FILL IT, HE'D GET HIS MONEY!
WHAT ORDER?
THIS ONE! IT CAME IN THIS MORNING! A RUSH! ONE THOUSAND POUNDS OF BONE-MEAL FERTILIZER! NOW CAN WE FILL IT IF HE WON'T SELL US THE SCRAP BONES?
IRWIN SNATCHED THE WHITE SHEET OF PAPER FROM ELLIOT'S HAND...
LET'S SEE THAT ORDER! HMMMM! ONE THOUSAND POUNDS... BONE-MEAL... DELIVERED MONDAY! MONDAY! IMPOSSIBLE! TODAY IS FRIDAY!
IF WE CAN'T LOCATE ANOTHER SCRAP WHOLESALER TO SELL US THE BONES TODAY, WE'LL LOSE THE ORDER!
STOP PIPE-DREAMING! YOU KNOW NO OTHER SCRAP-DEALER IN TOWN WILL SELL TO US ON CREDIT! SYE WAS OUR ONLY CHANCE, AND HE WON'T GIVE US ANY MORE! HE JUST SAID SO!... YOU HEARD...
ELLIOT! THAT ORDER COULD PULL US OUT OF THE RED IF WE HAD THE STUFF TO FILL IT, EH? WELL, I THINK I KNOW WHERE WE CAN GET IT!
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ALL RIGHT! ALL RIGHT! SO YOU GUESSED IT ALL THE TIME! SO YOU'RE REAL CLEVER! SO GIMME A CHANCE! LOOK! THIS IS ONLY THE BEGINNING OF THE STORY! THERE'S A MIDDLE AND AN END! LET'S GO ON...
IRWIN STARED OUT OF THE OFFICE WINDOW AT THE RUN-DOWN OLD CEMETERY LYING IN THE SHADOWS OF THE FACTORY BUILDING...
IRWIN! WHAT IN BLAZES ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT? WHERE CAN YOU GET IT?
COME HERE... TO THE WINDOW!
IRWIN POINTED OUT AT THE CROOKED WEATHER-BEATEN GRAVESTONES...
THERE!
WHA...? THE CEMETERY! GOOD LORD!
WHAT'S WRONG, ELLIOT? AFRAID? THAT'S A VERY OLD CEMETERY!
YES! HISTORIC! IF ANYONE FOUND US DIGGING IT UP, THEY'D LOCK US UP AND THROW AWAY THE KEY! I KNOW THE FOLKS IN THIS TOWN! THEY'RE PROUD OF THAT ANCIENT LANDMARK!
BESIDES! THEY SAY THAT GRAVEYARD IS HAUNTED! ONCE A GRAVE-ROBBER WAS FOUND... SPRAWLED NEAR A GRAVE HE'D OPENED! HE'D BEEN CHOKED TO DEATH! THEY SAID THE CORPSE DID IT!
BAH! SOME OTHER GRAVE-ROBBER PROBABLY CAME ALONG! THAT'S JUST A STORY THEY COOKED UP TO SCARE PEOPLE!
AND YOU DON'T THINK FOR ONE MINUTE THAT WE'D DIG UP THE BONES WE NEED WHERE WE'D BE SEEN, DO YOU?
WELL, HOW ELSE CAN WE GET THEM?
SIMPLE! WE TUNNEL TO THEM FROM THE CELLAR OF THIS FACTORY! WE COULD TAKE ALL WE NEED AND NO ONE WOULD BE THE WISER!
TUNNEL! I NEVER THOUGHT OF THAT!
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HEH, HEH! NEITHER DID YOU, EH, FIENDS? YOU... DID? HMM! I MUST BE SLIPPING! WELL, LET'S GO AHEAD WITH OUR GRUESOME LITTLE TALE AND SEE IF I CAN OUTSMART YOU! READY? GOOD! THAT NIGHT...
...THE SOUND OF A SPADE STRIKING SOFT EARTH ECHOED THROUGH THE EMPTY FACTORY! A GAPING HOLE YAWNED IN THE CELLAR WALL! THE TUNNEL HAD BEEN STARTED...
THIS IS... UGH... SLOW WORK, IRWIN! I DON'T THINK WE CAN DO IT... BY MONDAY!
DON'T WORRY! WE'LL BE THROUGH IN TIME! KEEP DIGGING!
ALL NIGHT THE TWO MEN WORKED! FINALLY, TOWARD MORNING, THEY STRUCK THE FIRST COFFIN...
A COFFIN! WE'VE REACHED A COFFIN!
WE'LL DON'T JUST KNEEL THERE... STARING! CHOP IT OPEN!
N-N-NO! YOU... DO IT, IRWIN!
ONE SIDE, YOU SNIVELING COWARD!
IRWIN CRAWLED PAST ELLIOT AND JABBED THE SPADE SAVAGELY INTO THE BLACK WORM-EATEN BOX BEFORE HIM! THE SIDE GAVE WAY WITH A SICKENING CRUNCH AND A FOUL SMELL BURNED THEIR NOSTRILS...
PHEW! WHAT AN ODOR!
WHAT DID YOU EXPECT? PERFUME? LOOK AT THE HOLE I SMASHED! THE WOOD IS SO OLD AND ROTTED IT GIVES LIKE PAPER!
IRWIN SCOOPED THE CONTENTS OF THE COFFIN OUT ONTO THE TUNNEL FLOOR! BLEACHED BONES, COVERED WITH TATTERED REMAINS OF CLOTHING, SPILLED OUT! A GRINNING WHITE SKULL ROLLED FORWARD, STARING AT THEM WITH HOLLOW BLACK EYES...
UGH! IRWIN! I... I'M FRIGHTENED!
STOP ACTING LIKE A CHILD, ELLIOT!
CRAWL BACK TO THE CELLAR AND BRING A SACK! WE'VE GOT A LOT MORE COFFINS TO LOCATE TO FILL THAT ORDER!
Y...YES, IRWIN! I'M... GOING!
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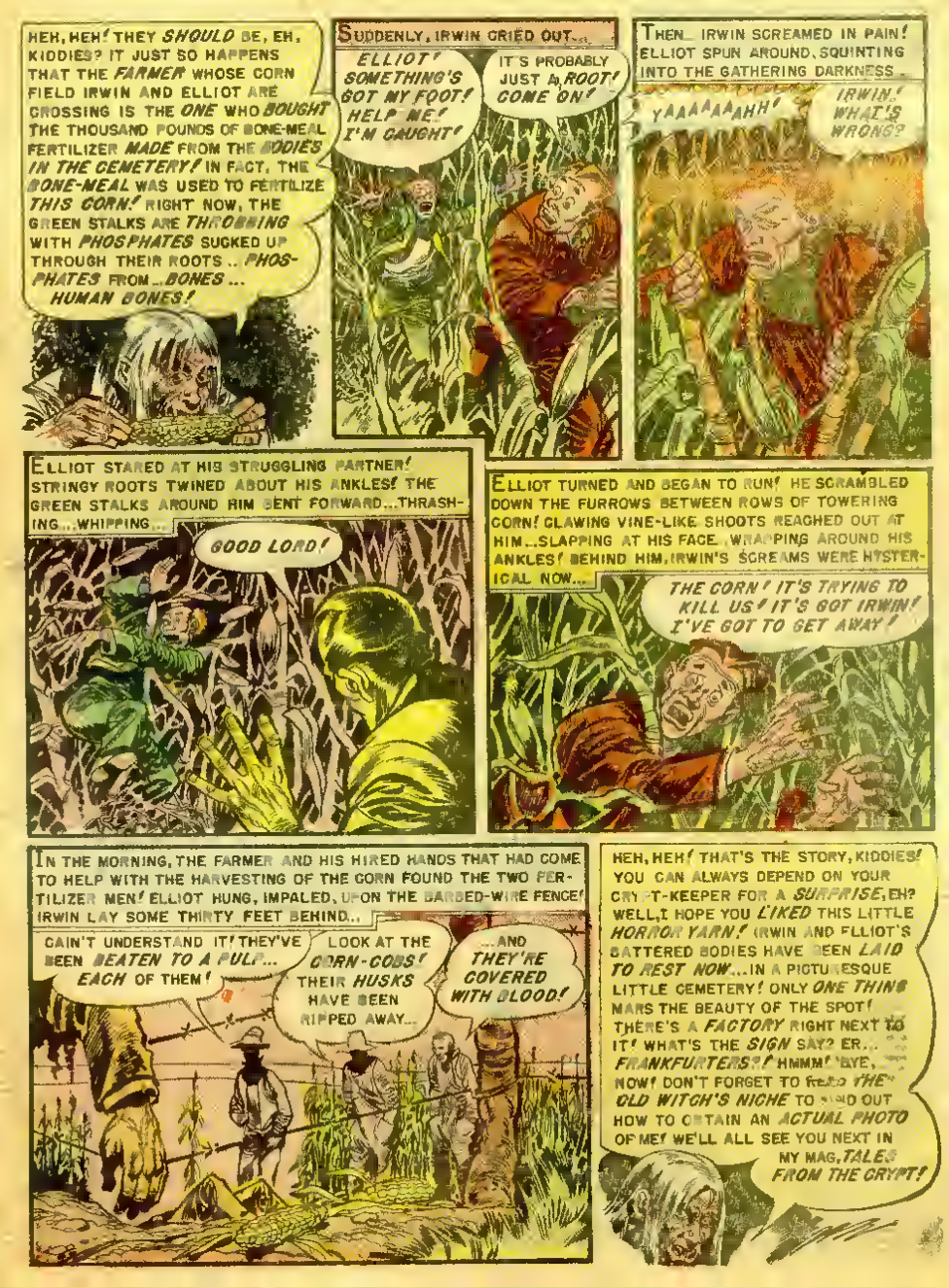
HEH, HEH! WHAT DO YOU THINK NOW, CREEPS? THINK MAYBE THE TUNNEL'S GOING TO CAVE IN? NOPE? NOTHING SO UNIMAGINATIVE! THE CORPSE COMES TO LIFE? DEAR, NO! KEEP GUESSING...AND GO ON READING...
SOON, ELLIOT RETURNED WITH THE SACK...
HERE'S THE SACK, IRWIN!
FILL IT UP WITH THE BONES FROM THE COFFIN I OPENED THERE! I THINK I'VE HIT ANOTHER COFFIN...HERE!
Y YES, IRWIN!
AH! WE'RE IN LUCK! THIS IS ANOTHER ONE! WHEN YOU'RE THROUGH, TAKE THE SACK BACK TO THE CELLAR AND BRING AN EMPTY ONE!
AND SO ALL DAY SATURDAY AND INTO SATURDAY NIGHT THE TWO PARTNERS DIG! THE SACKS OF BONES PILED UP...HIGHER AND HIGHER...
THIS LOOKS LIKE ENOUGH, ELLIOT! YOU CAN STOP DIGGING IN THERE!
OKAY, IRWIN!
SUNDAY MORNING FOUND THE TWO MEN BUSY EMPTYING THE SACKS OF BONES INTO THE GRINDING MACHINES...
JUST THINK, ELLIOT! WITH THE MONEY WE GET FROM THIS ORDER, WE CAN PAY OUR DEBTS!
WE'RE IN BUSINESS AGAIN, IRWIN!
THE GROUND-UP BONES WERE PACKED IN SACKS AND LOADED ON THE TRUCK...
THIS IS THE LAST BAG! IN THE MORNING WILLY CAN DRIVE IT OVER AND DELIVER IT!
WHEW! I'M EXHAUSTED! I COULD SLEEP FOR A WEEK!
THEN THE CELLAR WALL WAS REPAIRED...
THERE! THE OPENING IS ALL CEMENTED UP! NO ONE WILL EVER SUSPECT! BY THE WAY, ELLIOT! STILL BELIEVE THOSE STORIES ABOUT THE GRAVEYARD BEING HAUNTED?
I I GUESS NOT, IRWIN!

HEH, HEH! S'MATTEN, KIDDIES? RUNNING OUT OF GUESSES? NO, NOTHING HAPPENED TO IRWIN AND ELLIOT! IN FACT, AFTER THAT, BUSINESS WAS PRETTY GOOD! BILLS WERE PAID! MORE ORDERS POURED IN! THEY BECAME QUITE WEALTHY! THAT FALL...
WELL, IRWIN! THE SEASON'S ALMOST OVER! I THINK YOU AND I DESERVE A VACATION!
GOOD IDEA, ELLIOT!
WHAT SAY WE DRIVE UPSTATE TO SOME MOTEL AND TAKE A GOOD REST?
SOUNDS GREAT! WHEN DO WE LEAVE?
THE NEXT DAY, IRWIN AND ELLIOT CLOSED THEIN FERTILIZER FACTORY AND STARTED OUT ON THEIR VACATION! THEY DROVE ALL DAY... BUT TOWARDS EVENING...
WE'D BETTER FIND A PLACE TO SPEND THE NIGHT, ELLIOT! IT'S GETTING DARK!
YEAH! KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN AND UH... WHAT THE..?
THE ENGINE SPUTTERED AND STALLED! THE CAR COASTED TO A STOP! DARKNESS WAS CLOSING IN...
BLAST IT! WE'RE OUT OF GAS!
LOOK! WE'VE STOPPED BESIDE A CORN FIELD! THERE MUST BE A FARM HOUSE AROUND!
THE TWO MEN GOT OUT OF THEIN CAR AND STARTED ACROSS THE CORN FIELD BETWEEN THE TOWERING ROWS OF STILL-UNHARVESTED CORN...
GOLLY, THIS CORN GROWS TALL! IT'S WAY OVER OUR HEADS!
HUNNY! IT'S GETTING DARK! THIS WAY...DOWN THIS FURROW
IRWIN AND ELLIOT MOVED THROUGH THE ROWS OF GREEN STALKS... PEERING AHEAD OF THEM... SEARCHING FOR A LIGHT... A SIGN OF A FARM HOUSE...
EERIE, ISN'T IT, ELLIOT?
I, I'M AFRAID, IRWIN!


HEH, HEH! THEY SHOULD BE, EH, KIDDIES? IT JUST SO HAPPENS THAT THE FARMER WHOSE CORN FIELD IRWIN AND ELLIOT ARE CROSSING IS THE ONE WHO BOUGHT THE THOUSAND POUNDS OF BONE-MEAL FERTILIZER MADE FROM THE BODIES IN THE CEMETERY! IN FACT, THE BONE-MEAL WAS USED TO FERTILIZE THIS CORN! RIGHT NOW, THE GREEN STALKS ARE THROBBING WITH PHOSPHATES SUCKED UP THROUGH THEIR ROOTS .. PHOSPHATES FROM ... BONES ... HUMAN BONES!
SUDDENLY, IRWIN CRIED OUT...
ELLIOT! SOMETHING'S GOT MY FOOT! HELP ME! I'M CAUGHT!
IT'S PROBABLY JUST A ROOT! COME ON!
THEN... IRWIN SCREAMED IN PAIN! ELLIOT SPUN AROUND, SQUINTING INTO THE GATHERING DARKNESS...
YAAAAAAHH!
IRWIN! WHAT'S WRONG?
ELLIOT STARED AT HIS STRUGGLING PARTNER! STRINGY ROOTS TWINED ABOUT HIS ANKLES! THE GREEN STALKS AROUND HIM BENT FORWARD...THRASHING...WHIPPING...
GOOD LORD!
ELLIOT TURNED AND BEGAN TO RUN! HE SCRAMBLED DOWN THE FURROWS BETWEEN ROWS OF TOWERING CORN! CLAWING VINE-LIKE SHOOTS REACHED OUT AT HIM...SLAPPING AT HIS FACE...WRAPPING AROUND HIS ANKLES! BEHIND HIM, IRWIN'S SCREAMS WERE HYSTERICAL NOW...
THE CORN! IT'S TRYING TO KILL US! IT'S GOT IRWIN! I'VE GOT TO GET AWAY!
IN THE MORNING, THE FARMER AND HIS HIRED HANDS THAT HAD COME TO HELP WITH THE HARVESTING OF THE CORN FOUND THE TWO FERTILIZER MEN! ELLIOT HUNG, IMPALED, UPON THE BARBED-WIRE FENCE! IRWIN LAY SOME THIRTY FEET BEHIND...
CAIN'T UNDERSTAND IT! THEY'VE BEEN BEATEN TO A PULP... EACH OF THEM!
LOOK AT THE CORN-COBS! THEIR HUSKS HAVE BEEN RIPPED AWAY...
...AND THEY'RE COVERED WITH BLOOD!
HEH, HEH! THAT'S THE STORY, KIDDIES! YOU CAN ALWAYS DEPEND ON YOUR CRYPT-KEEPER FOR A SURPRISE, EH? WELL, I HOPE YOU LIKED THIS LITTLE HORROR YARN! IRWIN AND ELLIOT'S BATTERED BODIES HAVE BEEN LAID TO REST NOW...IN A PICTURESQUE LITTLE CEMETERY! ONLY ONE THING MARS THE BEAUTY OF THE SPOT! THERE'S A FACTORY RIGHT NEXT TO IT! WHAT'S THE SIGN SAY? ER... FRANKFURTERS?! HMMM! 'BYE, NOW! DON'T FORGET TO [illegible] THE OLD WITCH'S NICHE TO [illegible] OUT HOW TO OBTAIN AN ACTUAL PHOTO OF ME! WE'LL ALL SEE YOU NEXT IN MY MAG, TALES FROM THE CRYPT!

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